Welfare to Work

Five Point
Action Plan

Ontario

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Backgrounder
Document d'information

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Ministry of Community and Social Services

Ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires

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THE MIKE HARRIS GOVERNMENT FIVE-POINT ACTION PLAN

The Mike Harris Government's five-point action plan is designed to see that Ontario Works is more responsive to the needs of welfare recipients. It fulfils the *Blueprint* commitment to help tear down the barriers to employment for recipients and get more people earning and learning their way to new jobs. The five-point plan includes:

1. Doubling placements to provide more people with the opportunity to get the job-related experience they need to find and keep a job. We recognize that sometimes the greatest barrier to employment is simply a lack of workplace experience.

2. Additional supports will be provided for people on welfare who face significant barriers to getting a job. We will provide $10 million in funding for new innovative programs to help people with multiple barriers to employment get a job.

3. Mandatory literacy testing and training to help people on welfare who can't read and write break through the literacy barrier and get ready to work. The Government recognizes that literacy is a basic yet important skill in today's marketplace.

4. Advanced training to give our caseworkers the skills they need to better help people facing barriers to employment and take the steps they need to move from welfare to work. No matter how complex the needs of people on welfare, we want to give caseworkers the ability to help them.

5. Mandatory drug treatment to help people overcome an addiction that is a barrier getting a job. (Further details attached).

Action Plan Step Five:

Mandatory Drug Treatment for Welfare Recipients

Ontario Works, Ontario's mandatory welfare-to-work program, provides participants with the supports they need to overcome barriers to employment and get ready for work.

In keeping with our *Blueprint* commitment, this initiative will ensure that Ontario Works participants who are unable to find or keep a job because of an addiction to illicit drugs, alcohol or prescription drugs are connected to treatment. People will be referred to an assessment test only if there is reason to believe their addiction is posing a barrier to employment.

Under Ontario Works, participants are expected to take steps to address their specific barriers to employment. People who cannot find or keep a job because of an addiction will be expected to go for treatment, supported by an individualized service plan to provide them and their families with the help they need while they are in recovery.

Key Elements of the policy:

The addiction treatment policy is based on advice received during the consultation.

1. ***Referral to mandatory drug treatment for participants whose addiction is a barrier to employment***
   - People on welfare will be provided information on addictions and on services in their community at the Ontario Works orientation session. Education on addiction is part of the program.
   - There are three ways that people could be referred by a caseworker for an assessment:
     - people come forward and say they have a problem;
     - a caseworker observes indicators of addiction;
     - a participant has trouble meeting program requirements and needs assistance.
   - Participants will be referred to specialized staff in local welfare offices, knowledgeable about both the welfare and the addictions services system. Staff will use a screening test to determine if an individual should be further assessed. If the test indicates a participant needs further assessment, staff will refer the person for a full assessment and treatment.
   - Participants will be referred to a treatment program that suits their needs – emphasis will be on using local resources where possible.
   - The policy is mandatory. Our consultations told us very few ever enter treatment voluntarily. Most people go to treatment because their employer, a family member, or a friend has compelled them to go. Some people are sent to treatment by the courts. There is research that suggests mandatory treatment can be as successful as voluntary treatment.

2. ***Relapse may be part of recovery***
   - Benefits will not be tied to success: it's only required that someone give full effort to removing addiction as a barrier to his or her employment. If people do not succeed initially, they will be able to try again.

3. ***Supports will be available for people in treatment***

- People who are referred to treatment will have an individualized service plan. The plan will:
  - describe the roles and responsibilities of the participant and the service agencies;
  - ensure that people receive supports (such as child care and transportation to treatment) according to their needs.
- Addiction affects whole families. There will be services for children and other family members to help with the recovery process.

4. ***Ontario Works delivery agents will work with treatment providers to maximize capacity in their municipalities***

- We have heard in some places there are waiting lists for treatment. We recognize there will be a need to spend money to expand capacity and make the program work. We want to ensure there is enough capacity in the system to support the policy. Additional resources underscore the purpose of this initiative: it's not about saving money, it's about saving people.
- Enormous change for both the welfare and the treatment system will require collaboration, innovation, and creative service delivery.
- We will build on the existing network of treatment services.

5. ***The mandatory drug treatment policy will be phased-in across the province***

- In consultation, we heard that we should go slowly and build on success
- The phased-in approach will provide an opportunity to assess program design, including tools, training and protocols
- We will begin with three to five municipalities in the New Year, and will expand the program across the province to 47 municipalities in 47 months.

6. ***Legal issues***

- We have given careful consideration to legal issues. This initiative is about removing barriers to employment and focuses on providing treatment for participants whose addiction prevents them from seeking and getting a job.
- We have created a program that accomplishes an essential purpose, providing treatment for participants whose addiction prevents them from seeking and getting a job. We believe our policy has the right elements to help people beat their addiction and take back their lives.

7. ***The screening test***

- Specialized staff and comprehensive assessment tests will help identify where addiction is a barrier to employment for participants. Specialized staff in local Ontario Works offices will conduct initial screening tests. Based on results, participants may be referred for in-depth assessments.
- A range of tools currently recognized and used in the substance abuse treatment sector will be tested in early sites, for example the CAGE test, a screening test that helps determine if an individual has an addiction or not. Early sites will provide the opportunity to strengthen procedures for how people are identified and sent for assessment, testing and treatment. There are no plans for universal or random chemical tests. There never have been.

The Road to Recovery: How an addict gets to treatment

- Each person who applies for welfare attends a mandatory employment information session which includes information about addiction treatment. Next the person meets with a caseworker to develop a participation agreement to outline the activities the individual must pursue to remain eligible for welfare.
- The new applicant may acknowledge a substance problem exists and volunteer for treatment. If so, the individual will be referred for comprehensive assessment, or go directly to an addiction treatment program.
- While monitoring an individual's participation, the caseworker may identify signs of addiction, such as, obvious intoxication. They will have the participant complete a screening test and, if necessary, a comprehensive assessment: failure to participate in either the test or the assessment will mean the person has made themselves ineligible for welfare.
- If an Ontario Works participant fails to meet the mandatory requirements of the program, the caseworker may suspect a substance abuse problem is involved, and refer the individual for a screening test and, if necessary, a comprehensive assessment.
- Participants will only be referred for mandatory treatment – to mutual aid groups like Narcotics Anonymous, outpatient programs, or residential treatment – after a professional comprehensive assessment reveals that treatment is required.

What We Heard:	Our Program :
• Treatment works.	• Ontario Works participants will be referred to local addiction service providers, who have the expertise and experience to help people begin recovery.
• Focusing solely on illicit drugs would miss the point that many people are addicted to more than one substance. Addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs should also be addressed from the outset.	• A comprehensive approach will be taken and the focus will include addiction to illicit drugs, alcohol, and prescription drugs.
• Addiction is a complex social and health condition. The initiative should start slowly to build upon experience to ensure the success of the program.	• A phased-in approach will be utilized. Programs in three to five municipalities will be operational early in the new year and will be phased in across the province in 47 months.
• Regular caseworkers do not have the necessary expertise; specialized staff should be used.	• Specialized staff who understand and can work in both the addictions and welfare systems will be used in local welfare offices. Training will be provided for caseworkers to help them meet their new responsibilities.
• Chemical tests demonstrate drug use, not abuse. In-depth assessments should be conducted.	• Specialized staff in local welfare offices will complete initial screening tests, such as the CAGE Test. If necessary, participants will be referred for further, in-depth and comprehensive assessments and tests, as part of the treatment process.
• Expansion of a range of addiction treatment options may be necessary, for example residential services, detoxification services and services for women, youth and other special populations.	• Municipalities are encouraged to investigate opportunities to maximize resources within communities by forming linkages between social assistance and addiction services programs. Building on the existing network of treatment services will be encouraged. Meeting the range of demands for treatment will require new resources. Additional resources underscore the purpose of this initiative: it's not about saving money, it's about helping people get ready for work.
• People with addictions often have multiple problems including mental health, sexual or physical abuse, social and family problems. Once the addiction is addressed one has to be prepared to deal with other problems.	• Municipalities will make linkages with appropriate community agencies to provide supports for people who are dealing with these issues. People who are referred to treatment will have an individualized service plan. The plan will describe the roles and responsibilities of the participant and the service agencies, ensure that people receive the supports they require (such as childcare and transportation to treatment) according to their individual needs.

What We Heard:	Our Program :
• Addiction affects the whole family.	• Comprehensive treatment will include support for the children and spouses of addicts.
• Virtually no one goes into addiction treatment voluntarily. Most people enter treatment under some pressure from family, employers or the legal system.	• Those who refuse treatment will be ineligible for Ontario Works benefits. However, everyone involved will work together to help the individual and his or her family get their lives back. As soon as an addict turns around and participates in treatment, he/she will be reinstated immediately.
• Treatment is a long-term process; someone may take several attempts to beat their addiction.	• The program recognizes that relapse is often part of recovery. Participants who are having difficulty meeting their treatment goals will be able to revise their plans with their caseworker, specialized staff and addiction services workers. Benefits won't be tied to success. If someone makes an honest attempt at dealing with their addiction and they fail – we'll stick with them and try again.
• Enormous change for both the welfare and the treatment system will require collaboration, innovation, and creative service delivery.	• Ontario Works delivery agents have already shown innovative and creative service delivery when they implemented programs such as the Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP) and programs funded through the Innovation Fund. This initiative will draw upon the same kinds of collaboration within communities to provide individualized services to people with addictions that are a barrier to participation and employment.
• Extensive staff training will be required to successfully address substance abuse issues.	• Caseworker training is critical. All Ontario Works staff will be trained. Additional training will be provided for workers who come into routine contact with participants. Specialized staff will have expertise in both the addiction services and the welfare systems.

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